STRATFORD-ON-AVON
LEAMINGTON & WARWICK

DIXON · SCOTT

BEAUTIFUL · BRITAIN

IN THIS SERIES

ABBOTSFORD
CAMBRIDGE
CANTERBURY
CHANNEL ISLANDS
ENGLISH LAKES
FIRTH OF CLYDE
ISLE OF ARRAN
ISLE OF MAN
ISLE OF WIGHT
KILLARNEY
LONDON
OXFORD
PEAK COUNTRY
STRATFORD-ON-AVON
Leamington and Warwick
THAMES
TROSSACHS
NORTH WALES
WESSEX
WESTMINSTER ABBEY
WINDSOR AND ETON

PUBLISHED BY
ADAM & CHARLES BLACK
SOHO SQ., LONDON

Beautiful Britain

Stratford-on-Avon
with
Leamington & Warwick

By

Dixon Scott

London
Adam & Charles Black
Soho Square W
1911

FOR THE DEAR OLD COTTAGERS

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

STRATFORD-ON-AVON

CHAPTER I

SUB ROSA

"*I had come to Stratford on a poetical pilgrimage. My first visit was to the house where Shakespeare was born, and where, according to tradition, he was brought up to his father's craft of wool-combing. It is a small, mean-looking edifice of wood and plaster, a true nestling-place of genius, which seems to delight in hatching its offspring in by-corners.*"—WASHINGTON IRVING, "*The Sketch Book.*"

Fiddle-de-dee!

§

Now, for a book which (as you see) doesn't even try to conceal the fact that it means to be a little bit mutinous, it may seem disappointingly tame-spirited to begin by suggesting that the best thing to do, on your first morning in Stratford, is to march straightway, in the orthodox fashion, to The Birthplace itself. Craft, reader, craft—not cowardice. For, quaintly enough, there is absolutely no other place so well equipped for lightening that load of illusions—those sham pieties and drawing-room conventions—under which most of us, even the healthiest, lumber into Stratford when we visit it first; there is really no place like his home for destroying precisely the myths it is ostensibly briefed to maintain. You may be a sentimentalist, swaddled in second-hand emotions: even you will be genuinely stirred. Or you may be a cynic, superior, going

through the affair with a kind of amused toleration : it will startle even you. It is literally a very shocking place ;—and when you sign the Visitors' Book there, on your way out, you are as good as being granted the emotional freedom of the town.

And moreover, apart from this instant reward, there is another consideration, just as practical, which ought to take you to the Ticket Office in Henley Street. For it is really a box-office where you book for the whole Stratford entertainment. It is a kind of toll-gate to the town, and the shilling you part with there, like a coin dropped into a slot, sets in motion an elaborate machine which will enable you later to rotate easily from point to point among the tangle of memorials—finding all the relics popping out, nicely polished and labelled, and all the venerated sites certified and beautifully scrubbed. For The Birthplace, after being for centuries a sort of booth run by free-lance showmen (at one time, for instance, a mild extra, like bread and cheese with your beer, thrown in by the Swan and Maidenhead Inn), is now the property of an impersonal Trust ; and this body—composed of belted earls and marquises and Dr. Sidney Lee—melts your shillings into a shining apparatus for protecting the best features of the town—beating them into swords for protecting old sites, into spades for unearthing new treasures, into all sorts of spick-and-span sign-posts and intellectual fences. . . . The Birthplace, in short, is a kind of scrupulous kitchen where all the plums of the place are picked and stoned and turned into a thoroughly digestible pie.

To The Birthplace, then, by all means.

§

It is its smart official aspect, indeed, that produces unpremeditated spasm the first. Both cynic and sentimen-

talist, though for very different reasons, would have welcomed something much more mildewed and tottery. "*Mean-looking edifice*"? "*True nestling-place of genius*"? Natty and spruce—neatly tiled—with a sprightly model-dwelling air, this clean-cut cottage might have just been transferred from Bournville, or Letchworth, or Port Sunlight. It is exactly like a bright lodge at the entrance to some big estate. And, in fact, it is as little like the house that stood here three hundred years ago, as a brisk cob, in bright harness, resembles its shaggy forebear on the hills.

Yet the Trustees, who are the authors of this trimness, have really done perfectly right. The secret history of these Henley Street houses—discreetly kept dark by the guide-books—is a tale of endless conversions and changes; and all that links even the site with the poet's birth is a vaguely floating tradition. (Startled? Oh, that is nothing! You wait.) "*A cellar under the Birthplace is the only portion that remains as it was at the date of the poet's birth*," says Dr. Sidney Lee himself;—and in all these matters you may feel thoroughly safe if you keep well on the Lee-side. "*The house that Shakespeare was born in is not certainly known:*" so, firmly and finally, even the great Furnivall. The Trustees, accordingly, honest men, when they took the tumble-down tenements in hand, would seem to have determined to make it perfectly plain that they were practising no jiggery-pokery. They might have run you up a replica, chemically ripened and stained. They refused to play the stage-carpenter. They preferred to erect, on the legendary site, and out of the venerable timbers and stones, what is practically just a clean-cut coffer, carved appropriately into the shape of a cottage, in which all the drifting rumours and relics and emotions might be compactly stored. . . . I have said that the place looks, externally, like the little entrance to a large estate—and that, in a sense, is exactly what it is. To squeeze into

the coffer—through the narrow upright lid that looks so like a really-truly door—is to feel at first almost frightened by the effect of uncanny capaciousness. You feel as though you had been magic'd, like Alice; or as though that neat little house-front were just a painted panel on the side of a honeycombed hill. Room opens out of room—staircases climb twistily—there are cobwebby attics and solemn doors labelled "Secretary," "Library"—and you seem to be eternally peering into profounder recesses and down dim, deep, echoing aisles. Partly, this is purely physical; the property does practise a very literal duplicity—admitting you, through its single doorway, into what are actually two cottages combined. But still more, I fancy, it is the result of the rich layers of memoria heaped up there—each relic a door in disguise, swinging softly back as you peer at it, luring the mind into all kinds of labyrinths and glimmering corridors and caves of suggestion. . . .

§

The actual ceremony of induction—raised by now to the level of a ritual—is decidedly worth recording. (No, the Gedges are not there now; Mr. James's pastel is a relic too.) You tug the lodge bell lustily, and, something suddenly, find yourself receiving a subdued welcome from a butler trying bravely to bear up. He might be admitting you to his master's funeral; there is a touch of respectful reproach in his air too; and you cannot avoid the feeling that your tweeds are scarcely reverent, and that you ought to be thoroughly ashamed of the way you rang the bell. Abashed, you bungle the step, stumble on the threshold, and bang into the room beyond with a rowdy clatter—to meet the pained glances of a group of earlier mourners. Actually, of course, they too are suffering from the same furtive oppression; but you, I am sure, are far too sensitive a soul to realize that, and you shrink

THE GUILD CHAPEL AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON.

shamefacedly into a corner. The melancholy butler closes the door with a pointed gentleness, tiptoes to the centre of the room, and resumes his feeling testimony:

"*Here, by the fireside*," he says, turning sadly to the open hearth, "*the children would gather together on the long winter evenings their little porringers in their hands and eat their frugal supper by the side of the crackling logs. An oaken settle carved as was the custom of the time would be drawn up here*"—evocative gesture—"*making a protection from the draught, and on it the poet's father and mother John Shakespeare butcher and glover and Mary his wife would sit and watch the little ones at play. . . . Yes sir, the floor has been repaved, but the original materials were employed. . . . No sir*" (regretful, but firm), "*that chest did not belong to the family. It is, however, ascribed to The Period. Yes madam, the windows would be where you see them to-day. It is not always*"—and here, relenting a little, he seems to stoop towards our common humanity—"*it is not always so dark as it is this morning*." Emboldened by this concession—and pathetically anxious to sustain the note—someone ventures to murmur, ingratiatingly, that, yes, the place *does* look as though it perhaps needed a little sun and air. Whereupon—

"I guess it got about all the Son and Heir it had a vacancy for three hundred years ago," says a reckless American person in a motor-veil, and sends the whole scared flock of us huddling in dismay to the twisty staircase leading to the room above. . . .

The room above is the holy of holies—The Birth-room itself—severely furnished with the inevitable bust. Here there is another evocation—Plato's heaven being called on, this time, to supply the sacrosanct four-poster. "*It stood just here*," says the Butler sternly, "*and it was through that window that the eyes of the infant poet first beheld his native town*." The certificate takes us all to the window, where

we peer dutifully, through the diamond-bedimmed panes, at a confectioner's shop opposite, an upholsterer's lower down, and the gulping motor-car immediately below into which the reckless American person is miserably slinking. . . .

Follows, next, the popular ceremony of the signatures—the display of the pick of them—some on the panes, some on the plaster walls. Carlyle's and Sir Walter's are extricated from the tangle of the first; the place where Byron's would have been on the latter, if the whitewash hadn't flaked off through sheer pride, is pointed out amid hushed applause; and, finally, you are compelled to stoop painfully down and peer at the spot where General Tom Thumb, stretching painfully up, wrote his name a few inches above the skirting-board. A solemn moment!

§

Orthodox enough, all this? Be calm! Even now your time has come. Commences now, in real earnest, the true initiatory rite, the genuine enfranchisement. For now you are passed from the bare bedchamber to the crowded upper room, marked "Museum," where the relics are stored—and out of the hands (this is the great point)—out of the hands of the inconsolable butler into those of—Mrs. Rose.

And Mrs. Rose—oh, Mrs. Rose is beyond price. Mrs. Rose is immense. Mrs. Rose is too good to be true. No melancholy satrap, she! Grey-haired, gold-spectacled, stately, she receives you at the head of the stairs with a kind of quivering courtesy—her blue eyes bright with pleasure, her soft cheeks charmingly aglow. She is the picture of a radiant hostess, and, like a happy hostess, she instantly sets you at your ease. Gone, in a trice, are your qualms and discomfiture, your furtive sense of unfitness; gone, too, that sense of breathing an air of stale discipleship

—a mixture of pedantry and gush. Pouf! The casements in that upper room are small, but the effect is positively as though someone had tossed up a wide window, letting in a gale of sweet air. And the breeze routs more than stuffiness. Dusty platitudes go down before it, right and left. Upon the bookshelves there's a wild commotion: tomes you have been taught to reverence—fee-fo-fumming so impressively about Periods and Sources—are seen to be swaying convulsively, to subside like a lot of owlish topers—and you positively laugh. Crash! Do not be alarmed. It, too, had to go. It is only that abominable bust, all indecent brow and a noble melancholy, which you have been forced, against your instincts, to worship for so long. Kick the pieces aside. You will never need them again.

For this dear old lady, all unconsciously, is really a dread iconoclast—her trim room a very dynamiter's den; and even as she so sweetly welcomes you the torch is being applied. The explosion does not wreck the actual Birthplace. But from this upper room, as from a central watch-tower, you can survey the whole field of Shakespearian research—that queer crowded Campo Santo; and it is in that necropolis that the actual crash takes place. Memorials reel—epitaphs are riven—ponderous mausoleums dissolve. And as you peer across the carnage, with staggered eyes, you seem to catch a glimpse, among the débris, of a little dancing figure, half familiar, half unknown, flitting through the foundered tombs elusively, laughing like a schoolboy freed from class. . . . The Man himself!

How is it done? It is quite unconscious, of course; but, perhaps, not entirely inexplicable. To begin with, do understand that Mrs. Rose is—really is—an expert. She is a kind of Camerarius, a living summary (and I am speaking quite respectfully now, please) of all that has been said and

sung about Shakespeare's personality. Her opportunity, of course, is unique. Shakespearian research, as you know, is so endlessly subdivided now that a specialist may drudge all his days in one little branch of the business, and never request or require any tidings of the toilers in other tunnels of the mine. But, sooner or later, sucked automatically, all the little scraps of expert evidence float into this little central room : from precious *trouvailles*, like the letter Dr. Wallace discovered in the Record Office the other day, right down to free-lance trivialities like the one you are skimming through now, they all appear, sooner or later, on Mrs. Rose's neat desk.

And the second they touch it—this is the true secret—they are tried by a test that instantly resolves them into their primal human elements. For Mrs. Rose follows all these flying rumours with all the eagerness and in precisely the spirit of a mother seeking news of some famous absent son : it is always, you feel, the maternal test, the human test, that she applies : what was the lad like ?—what think, say, do?—was he happy, hopeful, well married ?—handsome still, successful ? There can be few people in England for whom Shakespeare exists so actually—no dehumanized shade or awesome demigod, but a brown-eyed and lovable man, with children and cares, and poor health, and heaps of pluck. In Germany there are none.

Well, you pass into her presence. All about are her beloved souvenirs : books that the boy might have read, a letter he once received, imaginary portraits, scraps of writing by his relatives and comrades, maps of his journeys, the first free-and-easy biographies. . . . Her technique alone is a joy. Her favourite opening, "*I think we are all agreed, are we not? that when So-and-so said such-and-such* . . ." makes the most beautiful mush of the flippancy affected by your smart young person—school-marm or undergraduate—who has read Mr. Henry James's *The*

Birthplace, and rather wants to guy the whole affair. Her adaptability too. Break into the speech of the melancholy butler and the poor man has to begin all afresh; his hortation is a set-piece with only one point of ignition. But Mrs. Rose, though she has her pet phrases ("*We do not claim that our collection is of great extent, but we do dare to pride ourselves on its quality*," is a characteristic one, and another goes something like: "*What we say here*"—oh, she is a very leading article for "we's"—"*what we say here is that, given Shakespeare's genius, his opportunities for education were ample; whilst, lacking the genius, no amount of educational privilege would have enabled him to produce the plays. . . . At least*"—and she adds this with a kind of arch acrimony if any of the smart young persons are present—"*at least, with all our Universities and culture, we never seem able to produce a second Shakespeare—do we?*"), is wondrously ductile; and I assure you there are few pleasanter sights, even in Stratford, than that of this blue-eyed old gentlewoman, standing serenely in the midst of her treasures, surrounded by visitors, and, taking her cue from their casual questions, weaving all her knowledge and pride and old-fashioned phrases together into one sweet-smelling wreath of devotion to lay on her hero's grave.

But the great thing, of course, is not the scent of the wreath, but the fact that it makes such a magnificent noose. Little though she recks it (and what she will think when this page floats on her desk I shudder to imagine), Mrs. Rose is an executioner as well as an *exécutante*, and many a portly reputation kicks its last while she proceeds. For as the process goes on, as the vital, flesh-and-blood particles are extracted, you realize, as never before, how exceedingly simple and homespun and spare are the elements out of which these towering memorials have been built. All that great fabric of Shakespeariana—which began to overshadow

you at school, and beneath which, realizing that a life-time's study would be needed to master even its main lines and masses, you have always felt so uncommonly humble and helpless—crumbles down, in a crack, to a handful of homely anecdotes, a little antique tittle-tattle, and some scraps of fireside tales. The rest is surmise. Armed with Mrs. Rose's wreath, you are the peer of all the pundits in Europe; and with the dissolution of that lumbering erection, those monuments plastered with probablies, Shakespeare himself seems to leap into the sun. You learn, for instance—and the disclosure has the force of a symbol—how fictitious are the very features the plain man has been forced to revere. Hanging on one of the walls is a row of the regulation Shakespeare portraits: pictures, in various poses, of that hydrocephalous, insupportable creature whom Mr. Hall Caine is alleged to recall. Mrs. Rose turns to them,—says a few words,—and instantly all their little life ebbs out of them: they become a row of rickety masks. For she tells us, all regretfully, how little real authority there is for this pear-shaped simulacrum; how it is all based on a mixture of the features in a bad drawing made by a boy who probably never saw Shakespeare with those in a crude effigy turned out by a hack stonemason who probably never saw Shakespeare: each unlike the other, and both done when Shakespeare was a solid seven years dead. *She* confesses this with a sigh; *you* learn it with a whoop of glee. A case of mistaken identity! You have been thinking of the wrong man—shrinking from the wrong man; and Mr. Hall Caine has been parodying a parody. We have called Mrs. Rose many names—a Camerarius, an iconoclast, a gem of purest ray, but perhaps the description that befits her best is that of comfortable nurse, looking in with a reassuring candle, showing us that the face which had frightened us was just a shadow on the wall, and that the strange noise

that had awed us—a queer whispering and scuffling—was just the funny squeaking of some dear old fogies' pens.

And what a kindling discovery it is ! You recall with a thrill Professor Raleigh's ringing words : " *The rapid, alert reading of one of the great plays brings us nearer to the heart of Shakespeare than all the faithful business of the antiquary and the commentator.*" You think of Shakespeare with a new frankness and zest, as of a quarry, capricious and Puck-like, flitting uncaptured among the top-heavy tombs. He may not have been born in this house in April, 1564, but he will certainly come to life there on the morning of your visit. What had promised to be just a pious duty begins to turn into a golden chase. With Stratford lying like a fair field before you, and your handful of simple seeds in your hand, you advance to the gorgeous business of growing your own Shakespeare. Did we not say that The Birthplace looked like a lodge ? You are through it now—the estate lies before you—" the game's afoot, follow your spirit," and *Via Goodman Dull !*

CHAPTER II

WILL O' THE WISP

Now the simplest way of exploring that estate—and perhaps the safest way, too, of beginning your pursuit of the flitting Will o' the Wisp into which the old-fashioned woebegone Will has been so excitingly transformed—is to make use of the machinery your shilling is helping to keep going and follow the well-trodden tracks that lead from show-piece to show-piece in the town itself. Afterwards, you must go further afield. You will go to Charlecote and Shottery—to Luddington and Clifford Chambers—up to the brisk hill-country where his father was bred, and out to his mother Mary's dreaming valley-farm—getting, as you go, from people and places, little half-hints, rumours, glimpses, which will surely help you to fill in the features of that intimate, new, and of course highly lovable and credible portrait which you cannot help attempting to paint. The hills and the fields will circle sweetly about you ; and as you watch their slow movements you will remember that they helped to round and to burnish the little brain that in due time helped to shape and polish yours.

And as you pass to and fro in the streets themselves, among the low, demure houses, you will begin to catch your first glimpses of a still subtler and more searching power: the special character, I mean, as pure and vivid as a personality, of the strange little town itself. Try, as you go, if you can without posing, to fix and define in your own terms the delicate, odd "atmosphere" of the place—

STRATFORD-ON-AVON FROM THE RIVER.

The Church of Holy Trinity contains Shakespeare's tomb.

the quality which makes it so different from the other old English towns which you know. Founded on the flat river-side levels, but with its roads all swaying in sympathy with the Avon's own subtle curves, its physical charm, to-day, is due to a kind of slow eddying—a subdued end less flow and soft circling of houses that really does seem to have something of the half-hypnotic influence of sliding water. There are no "curtains"—no clinching architectural effects; there is absolutely nothing of the hole-and-corner picturesqueness of a Chester or a Warwick. Yet always there is a sense of something beyond, something just about to be revealed. Beauty is often the result of a delicate discord, romance is always bought by a battle; and this special beauty of Stratford is mainly due, I imagine, to the contrast between the apparent simplicity of the plain, low, demure houses and the real subtlety and secrecy of the quietly curving streets. As you move, the vista gently evades you; and even as you press forward the road by which you have come is silently erased. Despite the stolid house-fronts, it seems fugitive and feminine. You are in the very heart of England, yet you feel something faintly foreign and capricious in the air. And so, for all the restaurants and the "ye's" and the bustling market-places, you perhaps even catch yourself seeing some resemblance between its sly placidity and the mocking meekness of Monna Lisa herself. It may sound far-fetched—but there it is: a quality you will not fail to feel as you pass from show-place to show-place—an enigma which perhaps those places will now help you to solve.

§

Now, of these solider things—the plums, the "sights"—the principal are three:

(*a*) The Grammar-School, where Shakespeare was educated;

(*b*) New Place, or the site of it, where he lived and died;

(*c*) The church of the Holy Trinity, where his body was buried.

These are the town's advertised tit-bits. Various bodies charge you sixpence each for enjoying them. They have been vulgarized again and again. To the wholesome mind, viewing them from afar, they must seem surrounded by mawkishness as by a mist. Yet it would take a very resolute man to leave Stratford without visiting them all—and, if resolution is your quality, you need not fear to face them hopefully. Everything that is, is romantic. (I positively promise to demonstrate, later on, that Anne Hathaway's Cottage itself is one of the most deeply romantic spots in Great Britain.) And though they are relics, and hackneyed enough, you will find that if you square up to (*a*), (*b*) and (*c*) honestly they will grant you the precious stimulus that always comes from frank contact with real things.

It was, indeed, the very reality of the Grammar School, I remember, that offended Mr. A. C. Benson;—which would therefore be in any case remarkable as one of the very few orthodox shrines that have failed to reduce him to a condition of slow music. He saw it, he tells us, "*without emotion, except a deep sense of shame, that the only records allowed to stand in the long low latticed room in which the boy Shakespeare probably saw a play first acted, are boards recording the names of school football and cricket teams. The ineptitude of such a proceeding, the hideous insistence of the athletic craze of England, drew from me a despairing smile.*" Why? Perhaps a pedagogue's inside knowledge has something to do with the despair; but, for my part, I confess that what I chiefly liked about the place were just the frank signs of insistent boyishness—the blackboards and the school-caps, the dog-eared grammars and the resounding

gym. These things seemed to take you back to Shakespeare by the shortest, liveliest, and least altered road of all. The old rooms themselves indeed have changed very little: the old pedagogue's chair still stands there—fires were burning in the open hearths—bright patches of old Tudor roses still gleam on the plastered walls. But there is a part of the structure that has changed even less—and that is the stuff of the scholars themselves. They are probably the most genuinely Elizabethan articles in Stratford. Boys will be boys—and are now—and would be then. To look into any playing-field is to stare straight into the sixteenth century. And could you ask for any neater or completer symbol of the very spirit of the Renaissance—that fine mixture of lustiness and learning, of swords and pens—than the footer-pads and Virgil, tightly strapped together, which I saw lying in a corner of that "long low latticed room"?

And the ringing actuality of the place, its almost startling liveliness and energy, all are very welcome for another reason. They give the first shock to one's notions about Shakespeare's shabby education. You come to patronize a little dim-eyed dame's-school. You are confronted by the caps and gowns and the canonized cricket teams of a time-honoured public school. And you discover, on inquiry, that Stratford Grammar School always has been rather illustrious. Handsomely endowed in the fifteenth century—refounded by Edward the Sixth—it is decidedly a school with a career. Its headmaster in Shakespeare's time—a vicar of St. John's—received just double the salary of the headmaster of Eton. Few boys in England started life better fettled than those who were lucky enough to get their learning here.

I was shown over the buildings by one of the boys—a fifteen-year-old Elizabethan—"of an open and free countenance"—and as full of traditions as Aubrey. Just

as we reached the porter's lodge the bell in the Guild Chapel began to toll noon. "*Listen!*" says he, stopping dead. I did—getting a sentimentalist's satisfaction, no doubt, from the thought that the ear which had guided the delicate dance and recoil of the chimes in Ariel's beach-carillon had once sucked in and assimilated, hourly, precisely the same rich drops of ripe sound. . . . But when the last note had evaporated in the sunshine: "*There was a fellow who used to sit at my desk,*" says my guide reverently, "*who could do a perfectly corking thing. At the first tick of twelve (twelve's our dinner-hour, you know), he'd nip up from his seat—out of the door like an eel—and be home, half-way down the Shottery road, before the clock had finished striking. A jolly good quarter-mile sprint! Ripping, wasn't it?*" Perhaps I ought to have smiled despairingly —to have mourned "the ineptitude of such a proceeding, the hideous insistence of the athletic craze in England." But I didn't. I liked the look of heroic legend in the tale. It reminded me of another I had heard about a second Stratford Old Boy. His father was a flourishing butcher in the town, and the story goes that once, when he let the lad try his hand at killing a calf, the young cockerel "did it in a high style, and made a speech." The first of these vainglorious youngsters is now one of the most famous and effective editors in Fleet Street—a man (perhaps you know him) with the face of a disillusioned Paderewski. The other, of course, was just Shakespeare.

§

On the subject of New Place, however, I am open to smile as bitterly as any Benson in the land. It is a double, no, a triple, treachery. To begin with, the house itself was long ago destroyed; and a space of quiet greensward, some ivied hummocks and a well, is all the visitor now

sees. That is fairly widely known. Not so well known, however—indeed, very cunningly concealed—is the fact that since all these things can be seen to perfection from the roadway, plain to every passer-by, the pilgrim gets absolutely nothing for his sixpence save a dull five minutes with some rather rubbishy relics arranged in a back-parlour next door. (And, speaking personally, I'm a Scotchman.) And finally—most maddening of all—it appears that the orthodox outburst of anger—the compensatory damning and blasting of the name and fame of the late Rev. Francis Gastrell, the reported iconoclast—with which every literary pilgrim, from Lamb to Mr. E. V. Lucas, has sought to solace his disappointed soul—is utterly pointless and beside the mark. The Reverend Francis Gastrell, I find, did not destroy Shakespeare's house. What he did do, indeed, is really matter for the pilgrim's gratitude. For it was due to him—but let me set out the facts.

They are simple enough. It was in 1597—the golden year that gave him Falstaff—that Shakespeare bought for £60 the remains of that "praty house of brick and timber" which Sir Hugh Clopton had built beside the Guild Chapel a century before. He restored it,—renamed it,—nipped up adjoining properties and turned them into gardens and orchards, and finally, probably in 1613, settled down there "to spend," as the wise Wheler puts it, "the last years of his life in ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends, as all men of sense will wish theirs may be." That is the familiar First Act. The last (*Time:* 1759), scarcely less famous, presents the great scene of a Cheshire clergyman called Gastrell buying New Place, tearing it down in a fit of fine frenzy, and then flying from Stratford, "pursued by the rage and curses of its inhabitants." He too had taken the house in the hope of spending his last days in ease, retirement, and so forth; but the Stratford authorities exasperated him over some

point of taxes—literary pilgrims kept jangling his door-bell and nerves—and "*thus*," as the wise Wheler perorates, "*thus was the town deprived of one of its chief ornaments and most valued relics by a man who, had he been possessed of true sense, and a veneration for the memory of our Bard, would have rather preserved whatever particularly concerned its great and immortal owner than ignorantly trodden the ground which had been cultivated by the greatest genius in the world, without feeling those emotions that naturally rise in the breast of the generous enthusiast.*"

But, unhappily for perorations and our virtuous wrath, there was a muffled middle Act (*Time* : *circa* 1700) which turns the tragedy into a roaring farce. There is no doubt that Gastrell meant mischief, that he felt he was committing a perfectly gorgeous blasphemy when he flung himself at the old bricks and beams. But the beams and bricks were much younger than he thought. Their age was merely half a century. For, fifty years earlier, Sir John Clopton, douce man, having bought back the house of his ancestors, followed Shakespeare's own sensible precedent—pulled the old walls down, rearranged the very ground-plan, and set up, with the quiet approval of his fellow-townsfolk, a handsome, new, weather-tight edifice "in a modern and superb style." This was the house that Gastrell unbuilt,—and so all that he actually did was to remove, at his own expense, the obstacle that blocked our view of the only really sacred thing there—the venerable site itself. It is for this service there he has been rated by Landor and lashed by Rossetti : it is for this that you find him gibbeted anew in every guide-book in the land. Gentlemen ! The hour may be late—our guests may grow restive—but I feel it my duty to rise now, ceremoniously, and propose the health of a public benefactor—the Reverend Francis Gastrell.

The Church

§

From New Place to the Church is a bare five minutes' stroll, but the few strides seem to carry you clean into another kingdom. Fenced about by a three-fold barrier —broad river, quiet meadows, cloudy elms—the Church achieves an exquisite aloofness, embedded in pure margins of peace. As you approach it you pass into a circle of stillness—as though silence, like an inverted music, were pulsing out from it in waves. The noises of the little town dim and die as if you had fallen asleep, as though the softly swaying streets had lulled you, at last, into a condition of trance. And the Church itself, as it moves into sight, serenely ascending out of the trees, might be the vision seen in the trance, the dream which Stratford had been subtly striving to evoke. As the spire emerges and passes up against the sky you get the queer sense that you are watching the uprising of some great figure commanding silence. You will probably feel inclined to obey.

Its external beauty—very great, I feel—is of the kind that comes almost involuntarily. It is a patchwork of periods and styles—the chancel fifteenth century, the nave early fourteenth, the tower largely thirteenth, the spire as late as 1763: new generations, quite careless of congruity, have crushed in their own special idioms. Yet the result is no babel. Time has somehow elicited, from the efforts of all these scattered workers, their highest common measure of beauty; and you get a loveliness that seems really greater, and that perhaps is more profoundly organic, than anything that could be conceived by one strait and orderly brain. As in the case of a transmitted folk-song, the long journey has worn away all irrelevancies and laid bare a larger unity than a lonely mind could mirror, a rhythm, a form of beauty, not to be confined in any intellectual order.

Inside, where Time, baffled by all kinds of clever

obstacles, has had much less of his own way, the loveliness is perhaps not so compelling. You have to make allowances: for the incredible new glass; for the chairs of bright wood; for the modern-medieval choir stalls in the nave,—highly æsthetic contrivances for giving the poor little choristers cricked necks; and for an astonishing pulpit in green marble, which makes a shrewd trial of one's respect for the memory of Helen Faucit, Lady Martin. But when all this has been deducted there remains an unexpectedly big margin of beauty. It says much for the strength and dignity of the rest of the building that it can over-ride these details easily, absorbing them, and then leaping aloft with an almost cathedral-like spaciousness and pride. Coming to it as most of us do, indeed—with the impression that we are about to visit a village church marvellously honoured—the effect is almost overwhelming. Seen from a distance—from Philadelphia or Fleet Street—Stratford Church is just a rustic shelter above a glorious grave. But as you walk up the actual aisles, through the thronged pillars, with a soft-voiced subsacristan (the gentlest, most charming of guides) pointing to the treasures of beauty that were old and famous before Shakespeare was born, you begin to realize that though The Birth-room was lowly, his last resting-place was as royal as his name. Even his high memory, you feel, might enter here without stooping. Your progress, often interrupted, has a ceremonious slowness. And when at length you do reach the ledger-stone, with its familiar inscription, and look up at the monument with the familiar bust, it is to be startled by its relative littleness. It is the church that is adequate—not the tomb. It over-arches the grave with a splendid life of its own. A stranger might turn in here as into a cathedral—spend a full morning wandering happily about, go away satisfied, impressed—and yet never have noted the grave.

SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHPLACE AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON.

The house has been carefully restored and now appears practically as it did in April, 1564, when William Shakespeare was born.

Its Message

Well! It is an inversion that helps to increase your growing respect for Stratford. She was not such an unworthy mother, you begin to suspect: not the ragged peasant-girl of tradition. Brave bones had been buried here long before Shakespeare's; had mouldered and fed heroic memories. He was not the first of England's great creditors that the little town suckled. There is Dean Balsall's tomb; there Sir Hugh Clopton's cenotaph. Old tablets on the wall reflect a crowded and a beauteous life. They flood the mind with richer and purer colour than our modern windows. Some of the inscriptions have a touch of golden tenderness.* In the Clopton Chapel, on a long, dim, Della Robbia-like panel (which "The Right Honorable Dame Joyce, Covntesse of Totnes, Cavsed to be Repaired and Beautified Anno 1630"), you will remark one face of odd wistful beauty. She was Sir Hugh Clopton's daughter, and she drowned herself, hating love, when Shakespeare was a lad. Her ghost, they say, still walks the earth as Ophelia. The sight of these things sets you thinking. Stratford built this church, filled it

* Here is one. It is on a little monument that has a small medallion of a woman kneeling at a desk.

HERE LYETH INTERRED YE BODY OF MRIS AMY SMITH, WHO (BEING ABOVT YE AGE OF 60 YEARES AND A MAIDE) DEPARTED THIS LIFE AT NONSVCH IN SVRREY, THE 13th DAY OF SEP. Ao DNI 1626. SHE ATTENDED VPON THE RIGHT HOBLE. JOYCE, LADIE CAREW, COVNTESS OF TOTNES AS HER WAITING GENTLEWOMAN YE SPACE OF 40 YEARS TOGETHER: BEING VERY DESIROUS IN HER LIFE-TYME THAT AFTER HER DEATH SHE MIGHT BE LAIDE IN THIS CHVRCH OF STRATFORD, WHERE HER LADYE YE SAID COVNTESSE ALSO HERSELF INTENDED TO BE BVRIED: AND ACCORDINGLIE, TO FULFIL HER REQVEST, & FOR HER SO LONG TREW & FAITHFVL SERVICE, YE SAID RIGHT HOBLE COVNTESSE, AS AN EVIDENT TOAKEN OF HER AFFECTION TOWARDS HER, NOT ONELY CAVSED HER BODY TO BE BROUGHT FROM NONSVCH HITHER, & HERE HONORABLY BVRYED, BVT ALSO DID CAVSE THIS MONUMENT AND SVPERSCRIPTION TO BE ERECTED, IN A GRATEFVLL MEMORIE OF HER, WHOM SHE HAD FOVN SO GOOD A SERVANT.

full of beauty: music, dim heights, proud colour, echoes of old tales; a brave room, you reflect, for a growing boy to roam in. And Stratford could strike other strings, pluck a more passionate music. Here, on the walls, are the proofs of it; the clang and blare of ringing deeds were never far from her children's minds. . . . Perhaps your own sixpennyworth of patronizing homage begins to lose its look of superiority. Perhaps you are not entirely overwhelmed when the gentle subsacristan brings the long-drawn ceremony to a close by displaying, with a happy sigh, the crowded pages of his Visitors' Book. "*About thirty thousand visitors last year, sir,*" he says, "*from all over the world. Here is the signature of Mr. Sandow. . . .*"

Don't let us be too self-scornful, however. Even a Visitors' Book can be romantic: this one is not such an absolute anti-climax; the thick throng of signatures does help to complete the picture. As you turn the pages and see their agitated struggling—with here and there a celebrated name labouring through the press—you get an oddly vivid impression of an uncanny tumult and stir. It is a kind of camera obscura. Plumes toss—there are trumpets—trappings fling back the sun; crashing right across the world the cortège comes. And at your elbow is the old Church Register, open at the quavering baptismal entry: *Gulielmus, filius, Johannes Shakespeare.* You get a momentary vision of these thunderous battalions being led by a little baby.

"*. . . And here is the German Emperor's, sir. William Morris? Oh yes—Mr. Morris was very interested. And so was Mr. Joseph Chamberlain. Madame Patti is on the next page.*" There are some agreeable groupings. Sir Oliver Lodge and Bernhardt walking together in the procession make a somewhat pleasing picture. There are touches of characterization, too: Mr. Stephen Phillips' signature trailing a cloud of glory in the shape of some ot

IN ANNE HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE AT SHOTTERY.

his own verses; Miss Clara Butt's climbing robustiously up and down the greater part of a page. My own favourite, since you will have it, is the double-page which presents, on the one hand, a huddle of bishops and knights, with Lady Yarmouth, Prince Kropotkin, and Mr. George Wyndham crowded democratically in—and on the other, contentedly alone, making a serene counter-balance, the half-flippant, half-laborious signature of — Miss Marie Lloyd.

(I may say that Miss Corelli's signature *is* in the book. Mr. Hall—but that jest grows grey.)

Tired of sign-manuals? Then I can show you something much more unusual. A sign-pedal, in fact. It is not one of the recognized attractions; and perhaps I am breaking a seal—but for the sake of America let us risk it.

Return to the chancel, then. Stand facing the bust at a distance of four yards. Now scrutinize carefully the slab on which you stand. Scratched on its polished grey surface you will see a couple of shrill curving lines, like the scores left by a glacier. By no means glacial, however, the source of these. In fact—Mr. Henry James. Win the confidence of the gentle subsacristan, and he will tell you how that great artist, strolling here one afternoon, slipped on the polished slab, and most profoundly fell. Thus you may say that this slur signifies that the most Shakesperian artist of our time prostrated himself before the effigy of his intellectual ancestor.

Left at that, of course, the legend means little enough. But it has a suggestive corollary. "Mr. James used often to come in here at one time," my communicant ran on reflectively; "sometimes in the early morning—that's the best light, sir: sometimes towards sunset, when the crowds had gone. He would come into the choir here, all alone, and stay for perhaps an hour, perhaps three-quarters, just strolling quietly up and down. Thinking." A charming

picture, don't you feel? And one that makes a fitting end-piece to these pages in the church's praise. For it was no Bensonian nonsense about communing with the great dead that brought him here, you may be sure. He came for the sheer beauty of the place: the stately light, the leaping hush, the dimness, the great scabbard of colour hung on high amid the branching stone. So that you may take that hieroglyph as a hall-mark that nothing I have said is over-strained. It is a testimony that the most passionate and impeccable lover of beauty now living came once to Stratford Church, judged it exquisitely, and found it very good.

§

And now for a page of retrospect. *The Birthplace—The Grammar School—New Place—The Grave:* nothing yet but the sober, orthodox sights—and yet how uncommonly theatrical our orthodox ideas begin to grow: so dire a drug is honesty. Mrs. Rose, good woman, all unwittingly, gave away the dark secret of the pundits; showed us that all their abracadabra boiled down to a few homely facts. And now Stratford itself seems bent on proving that even these plain facts have been cockered up into a kind of coloured fiction. We all love our nip of melodrama, one supposes: we all like, in especial, to hear tales of young blood—of Burnses, John or Robert, of Keats or Carnegies—crashing out of obscurity into splendour: perhaps because they give a look of likelihood to certain shy persuasions we have about ourselves. And so the first chapters of Shakespeare's life have been carefully darkened in order to make the ultimate apogee flash out like the last page of a feuilleton. That his mother could not sign her name—that his father was fined fourpence for having a dunghill near his house-door—that "knives and forks in those days were conspicuous by their absence"—that he was sent to a village school—these are the facts, each

alone undeniable, which have been fitted together to form a picture of rank squalor and gloom. Stratford is seen as a huddle of hovels in a pit-mirk night of ignorance—and then suddenly, out of them, like a prince in a pantomime, steps the radiant writer of the Sonnets.

Now Dick Whittingtons are a noble sight—but we must try to be fair. Honest, though prosy. Our hero, then, to begin with, had noble blood in his veins—perhaps even royal blood: the name his mother could not sign was one of the most illustrious in the land.* His father, again, was no feckless loon, but a vivid, hot-witted creature—an exuberant soul, crammed with schemes, bubbling over into law-suits and heraldry;—and instead of signifying unspeakable barbarism, that famous fourpenny fine—levelled against him when he was actually an alderman—surely testifies chiefly to Stratford's alacrity: the London of that day, as we know, was no such prompt stickler for hygiene. The birthplace a hutch? It was bowered in orchards and gardens: it was from nightingales and merles that the boy got his first lessons in song-craft. And all this arcadian culture was not gained, as it often is, by a sacrifice of the urbanities. We have seen what the school was: exceptional in England. The town, too, was a lesson to its times. It, too, had been handsomely endowed. It had known special favours. The richness of its river-side lands had made it—oh, so long ago as the pre-Conquest days—a kind of pet child of the Saxon See of Worcester. It had been coddled with ecclesiastical favours: as ever, the wind was carefully tempered to the woolliest lamb. It was no mad accident that makes the Church seem now so astonishingly adequate. In a very real sense it was Shakespeare's birthplace as well as his grave. That carved and kingly room was really

* "By the spindle-side," says Mrs. Stopes, "his pedigree can be traced straight back to Guy of Warwick and the good King Alfred."

the sumptuous chamber in which the royal child was born.

For medieval Stratford did not waste her early gifts. She attracted strong men. She turned their offerings into beauty. She built the curving ways you have just been walking, and almost all the houses you can see. Hoisted into eminence on Shakespeare's shoulders? Her population then was as great as it is now; she had five mills clacking to your modern one; and a dozen vital industries now dead. Two of her fourteenth-century sons, calling themselves by her name, took turns in being Chancellor of England. One became Archbishop of Canterbury; another, Bishop of London; a third, Bishop of Chichester. And finally, she made a kind of working-model of all that was best in the life of the Middle Ages by founding that great Guild of the Holy Cross which controlled and coloured every detail of Shakespeare's daily life a hundred years later, and under the shadow of whose central tower he chose to make his final home.

§

You will have observed that tower already. Rising straight out of the traffic of Church Street, holding its weathercock bravely in the sun, it still forms the visual centre of Stratford, the hub round which the low streets seem softly to revolve; and it still remains, to my thinking, the most beautiful object there. Quite small in reality—almost dainty—it still manages, by dint of pure delicacy, to achieve an effect of grave strength; and when the sunset, surging up Scholar's Lane, breaks full on its western face, the silvery masonry, dyed a sudden crimson, has the menace of a low red cliff. Its secret, doubtless, is perfection of scale. It is modelled as deliciously as a toy. And the chapel which it guards is no less lovely: its tall, traceried windows of clear glass, set in the mouse-grey stone, give it

THE VILLAGE SMITHY, ASTON CANTLOW.

Shakespeare's paternal grandmother, Mary Arden, came from this village.

a crystal elegance, a positive stateliness; and the two parts, body and tower, are dovetailed so deftly, with such discreet adjustments of mass, that the eye finds it hard to unlock them. Nor is the place empty of life. It is still the school chapel. Twice every Sunday, in term-time, the boys attend service here : you may join them if you will. And each night at eight, during winter, and every morning at six, the town bellman creeps through a little door at the base of the Tower and tolls the heavy curfew. It rushes over the town with a queer ricochetting boom and recoil, an oddly exciting sound, with a guttural undernote like deep water in a rock gullet. It must have echoed rarely through the rooms of New Place.

But bolder summonses than bell-notes once radiated from this central tower. In those days it was the trunk of a stout tree of corporate authority—an ancient growth, even then, sucking up a rich sap from the township in the shape of systematic tithes—and extending, in return, great arms of counsel and protection and control. For all our municipalized efforts, we have really nothing quite so complete and searching now. The Guild of the Holy Cross (three centuries old when Shakespeare was born, and newly renovated and re-established as a town corporation) ruled the lives of the three thousand inhabitants with the intimate and tender tyranny of the father of a family. If you could borrow Mr. Wells' Time-machine for a moment, throw the starting-lever over to "past," and go pelting back through the centuries till your dial registered 1570 or so, you would find yourself, when you stiffly descended, in the middle of a township ruled with a punctiliousness that would put, I assure you, an uncommonly severe strain upon your laxer twentieth-century ideas. Your cap and loose tweeds, for example, would be instantly condemned : they were great sticklers for deportment in the fifteen-seventies. The town decided the dress

you must wear on specific occasions, and fined you, or worse, if you wore another. You probably incurred a fine, or worse, when you barked your shin getting off your machine;—for swearing, in the fifteen-seventies, was absolutely prohibited. You would have to prove that you had been to Church at least once within the month. If you had brought a dog, that dog would have to be muzzled. . . . Not much sign here, you would ruefully decide, of the semi savagery of Shakesperian story! But there would be compensations. You would be able to get bread that was bread and beer that was beer. The councillors themselves tested both periodically, and the baker who failed to use standard flour, the brewer who thought hops bad for beer, was ruthlessly fined—or worse.*

* Talking of beer, and of the general sweet temper of the place, I am reminded of one of the original ordinances of the Guild. It gives such a nutty picture of fourteenth-century Stratford that I reproduce it here—as modernized by Dr. Lee in his excellent little book about the town:

"*It is further ordained by the brethren and sisters, that each of them shall give twopence a year, at a meeting which shall be held once a year—namely, at a feast which shall be held in Easter Week, in such manner that brotherly love shall be cherished among them, and evil speaking be driven out; that peace shall always dwell among them, and true love be upheld. And every sister of the Guild shall bring with her to this feast a great tankard; and all the tankards shall be filled with ale; and afterwards the ale shall be given to the poor. So likewise shall the brethren do; and their tankards shall, in like manner, be filled with ale, and this also shall be given to the poor. But before that ale shall be given to the poor, and before any brother or sister shall touch the feast in the hall where it is accustomed to be held, all the brethren and sisters there gathered together shall put up their prayers, that God and the Blessed Virgin and the venerated Cross, in whose honour they have come together, will keep them from all ills and sins. And if any sister does not bring her tankard, as is above said, she shall pay a halfpenny. Also, if any brother or sister shall, after the bell has sounded, quarrel, or stir up a quarrel, he shall pay a halfpenny.*"

Isn't that as fragrant as hawthorn? And it is perhaps worth while noting that one of the most effective pieces of modern Stratford's municipal machinery was fitted together and perfected by the hands that wrote that delicate rule. I mean the Almshouses. The actual old

A WROUGHT IRON GATE AT CHARLECOTE.

And with an extension of authority we have now grown too lazy to attempt, or too self-indulgent to permit, the Guild ruled and regulated the tiniest details of a man's domestic affairs. We speak of cucking-stools nowadays as though they were symbols of barbarism. They point rather, don't you think ? to something almost excessively civil. . . .

No, no ! Old Stratford was never the slattern the fogeys and feuilletonists have pretended. And she was gallant, too, as well as strait-laced—gloried in glad colours —no puritan, for all her proprieties. Do not be deceived by the appearance of the High Street to-day. The eighteenth century, all sly sins and outer elegance, used to hang prim veils of plaster between its mean emotions and the outside world ; and over the naked jollity of the barge-

---

buildings themselves, drawn gravely up beside the Grammar School, their projecting upper stories, with their quiet panes, looking like whimsical old faces leaning meditatively forward on their hands, seem the very image of a contented wisdom ; and there is wisdom and sweetness in every detail of their constitution. They stand for something very different from the forces represented by that spick-and-span workhouse near the station. Men shun its brightness as though its scarlet bricks had been soaked in fever : to end your days there is to achieve the ultimate disgrace ; better, almost, the County Gaol. But the honour of ending their days in the old Almshouses of the Guild is one for which the townsfolk positively vie. It seems blessed to receive from such a giver. And it is a jolly and a touching sight to see the Mayor, as the Guild's modern representative, making his Yuletide visit to the almoners, taking them certain little grants of gold. They are all his lifelong neighbours, and they chat with him like old friends. It gives one not only a new conception of charity, but also a curiously direct idea of the *camaraderie* that ruled the old days. We found the Grammar School, next door, full of young Elizabethans. Here is a little microcosm of medievalism. And if you really wished to wander for a little in the Middle Ages, almost as actually as though Time had truly been retrieved, all you have to do is to strike up a friendship with one of the almoners, get him to play the part of host. Some of my happiest memories are of winter evenings spent in a certain low-beamed sitting-room there, with the snow whispering on the latticed panes, and the street outside dead still, and the old man, my friend, sitting contentedly by the fire, his long day's work done, serenely waiting for the final bedtime.

boards and cross-beams in Stratford it drew the discreet curtains of stucco that you see to-day. But had we really travelled back by a Time-machine we would have seen all the plaster flaking off from the house-fronts, as if shaken by the stutter of our engine, until, when the dial neared 1600, the whole place would leap out into loveliness, lustrous and delicate, as though the curving stem of the High Street had suddenly burst into flower. . . . You can get some idea of the translation by comparing the front of Harvard House there with its plain-faced neighbours. A few years ago it was just as flat and lack-lustre as they: but Miss Marie Corelli, who likes, in the intervals of less amusing work, to flit about Stratford in the form of an indulgent, though disturbing, fairy god-mother, tapped the prim façade with her wand (odd! the far-reaching effects of popular fiction) and set the stifled structure free. It gleams now in the midst of the genteel stucco, like some rich, glossy piece of old furniture, a handsome yet homely bureau, in a prim parlour suite swathed in holland. Try to conceive the effect of a town full of such strapping pieces,—remembering always that the modernized half-timber that you see, no matter how tenderly retouched, gives you only a chilly impression of oak-work bright from the adze. "Knives and forks conspicuous by their absence"? So they are, they tell us, in Japan—yet without any notable increase of coarseness. And if these Elizabethans mishanded their sirloins they carved some other things uncommonly well.

And before you climb aboard your Time-machine again, and go scuttling back to your draggle-tailed twentieth century, I have something still more startling to show you. Just step inside the Guild Chapel for a moment. . . . *Ecco!* When you left it, in nineteen-eleven, its walls were coated with clammy whitewash. Now, like a cerement, this has parted, and revealed a

flaming rout, in scarlet and gold and sky-blue, of dragons and paynims, horned devils and queens, all deliriously leaping round the walls in one colossal harlequinade. For old Sir Hugh Clopton, who lived in New Place (and was once Lord Mayor of London, by the way), devoted himself, towards the end of his life, to the beautifying of the Chapel: and by a brave stroke secured the services of an artist who must have been a fifteenth-century Goya. The result was this series of rollicking frescoes, round the nave and over the choir, filled with all the horrible horrors and hairbreadth escapes which a healthy medieval imagination, irradiated with religion as by beer, could crowd into his fairly catholic frame. He called the series, in his handsome way, *The History of the Holy Cross.* Never mind. He permitted no mere title to hamper his choice of subjects. And so King Heracleus hews down infidels—a shy Queen of Sheba receives a sad Solomon—goggling devils (large size) drop smug sinners into boiling oil—giggling devils (small size) have at them with halberds and spears. There are enchanted princesses imprisoned in paste-board towers; playing-card kings, and an Empress Helena on pilgrimage; prehistoric monsters prowling amiably through post-impressionist landscapes; and four fat knights with rolling eyes, plunging four simultaneous sword-blades into the back of an unconcerned Saint Thomas of Canterbury.* The gayest *revue!*

Yet it was not alone for the pure pleasure of enjoying this pantomime that I summoned you inside. Our point

* These paintings were discovered beneath the whitewash in 1804. They were carefully copied in colour by a Mr. Thomas Fisher, and then—carefully recoated! Perhaps it was felt that they were too joyful to be genuinely religious. By now, no doubt, they have been finally destroyed; but a big folio containing reproductions of Fisher's drawings is in the Birthplace Library, and I know that Mr. Wellstood, the courteous librarian there, will display it to visitors with joy. His delight in some of the devils (small size) amounts to a positive passion.

is that Shakespeare, the lucky lad, was simply saturated in these 'scapes and colours. For, as it happened, not only did he see it on Sundays in common with the rest of the town, but he was actually compelled to learn a good many of his lessons in the very midst of it. The school-house, when he was a scholar, was closed for prolonged repairs; and during that period the boys cribb'd and were cabin'd in the chapel itself. We all specialize in the child-nature nowadays; and speak confidently of the rich results to be obtained from a course of Rackham. Apply the same mode of calculation to this case, and endeavour to figure out the effect, on such a child, of this revel of green dragons and golden queens. Of one thing at least we may be certain: all the blue devils would be on the walls.

And there is still a little laughter left for us. For, if you'll believe it, the dear old things who devote themselves to the discovery of "sources" have never come tapping these particular walls. They wonder wistfully whether John Shakespeare ever took his son to see the Miracle Plays at Coventry—think it "highly probable" that the boy once saw a Morality performed in the Guild-Hall—but upon this particular pageant, burning into his brain all day long, they have not yet turned their spectacles. A pity, too: for what fun it would have been to hear them proving that Solomon suggested Shylock, that Cleopatra was probably drawn from the Queen of Sheba.

§

Well, that is Stratford as it really was—not the "filthy and benighted village" of tradition, but a place like an orderly inn—friendly, full of laughter, and as compact as a fireside circle. It is a discovery that gives tone to one's ideas. Seen against such a background, the figure of a fine poet loses its air of a staggering stage-trick, warms into kindred flesh-and-blood. If it is encouragement that

we need—there it is: a testimony to the deep logic and justice of life—much more comforting than miracles. Nor need Romance feel aggrieved at the loss of a second Whittington. To see Shakespeare as the due product of Stratford—not as an inexplicable minstrel wandering strangely through her streets—is to get a glimpse of something far more thrilling than mere melodrama. It is to realize that you are watching the last assemblage and concentration of an army of influences that have been thronging hither secretly through the thickets of the years, from the dim verges of the land, mustering for this final assault and sudden outburst of triumphing song. It is to realize how wide and perfect are the webs which produce such patterns. Old wars were waged, and long-forgotten lovers met in secret places of the hills, in order that this pure blend of blood and air might one day be accomplished; and the very modelling of Mercia, as we shall see, and the course of the Avon itself, had their deep due effect on the modulations of the ultimate brain. Stratford's midmost position on the map has more than a sentimental significance. It was not mere golden caprice that tossed Shakespeare upon England's heart. But in order to see and understand that noble gesture you must first be just to Stratford.

To that we turn in the next Chapter. Remark, in the meantime, another reward. Doing justice to Stratford in this way not only gives congruity to Shakespeare's first appearance there—it also helps you to understand what has been so often called his enigmatic, his incomprehensible return. The house he built for himself was situated, you remember, at the foot of the Guild Tower; at the very centre, that is to say, of the whole neatly clicking mechanism. I like to think that the choice was significant. Uncreative minds, common minds, too rarely realize, perhaps, that it is a pure passion for symmetry, shapeliness, system, which is the basis of the trouble

they call the artistic temperament. The silly pranks of their camp followers—and their own habit of melting down rough-and-ready rules in order to forge tighter ones—have won the name of lawlessness, of course, for the whole race of artists. But actually the poet is pledged above all things to the pursuit of law and order, rule and rhythm ; it is this that differentiates him from your man of business ; it is precisely this that is turning so many of the picked imaginations of our time—our Wellses, Galsworthys, Masefields—maddened by the chaos of modern London—into preachers and reformers. Now the Sonnets are the work of a mind supreme in its love of formality ; the Plays are above all human achievements in their care for balance and poise. To such a mind London, even then, would be a tormenting ravel of broken cries; even then it was a swarm of snatches—feverish, inconsequent, inconclusive. But in Stratford, as in our provinces to-day, life was lived to a finish. It had the cohesion of a household. It was a little working model of existence, rotating sweetly and visibly, like the wheels of a crystal clock. One seems to see a great artist going back, with a singular satisfaction, to the contemplation of this cool pattern, as rounded and finite as a verse or a song, or a picture in a frame.

CHAPTER III

THE REAL THING

WHATEVER else the reader may think of it, he cannot deny that this book has honestly tried to play the game. How courteously and uncomplainingly it has trotted round the regulation course! With what true politeness has it even indicated the Fountain in Rother Square! But now it asks for a respite. It wants to be quite unconventional. It insists on turning your attention to an utterly neglected and unhackneyed theme. It would actually like, in fact, to say a few words on the subject of—Stratford-on-Avon.

For there *is* a real Stratford, in spite of the picture-postcards; and though the real Stratford is picturesque, it is romantic too. "Stratford-on-Avon?" said a nice person just now, looking over my shoulder. "Ugh! The very name makes me feel bored. The Mecca of the lithry world." Yet behind the tea-rooms and the relics and the shops where "the tripper may buy things to remind him he has been where greatness once lived," a vivid and lovable life still beats and burns capriciously,—actually fostered and inflamed, indeed, by the very forces which seem to be stamping it into servility. There is romance, as we have seen, in the realization of how the little place once helped to mould the hand that wrote the Sonnets. But there is even more in the sight of that dead hand controlling the life and guarding the independence of the

town to-day. And that is precisely what is happening. Summoned by that hand, the travellers pour in from east and west and over the seas like an invading army,—and then, by the strangest stroke and all unconsciously, are changed into a body of defenders, stoutly manning the ancient walls. It may seem too good to be true, but it is a fact, none the less, that the shrill American party in rimless spectacles whom you have just watched buying bogus antiques in High Street is really a kind of priestess, helping to hold inviolate Stratford's strange and solitary soul.

§

But to understand how that can be you must know a little more of the place than can be picked up in a mid-summer fortnight. I was lucky,—for I saw Stratford, for the first time, in dead winter, when the tide of tourists had ebbed and the bogus antiques had been stowed away, and the real life of the place, left bare, seemed to stand out in relief. All the country-side through which I had ridden that day had been stripped of its summer disguises; nothing but the solid essentials remained—bare hills, bare boughs, the tough framework and ligaments, all the build of the land lying plain. And here in the town it was the same. The masque was done, the footlights lowered; I caught the players in the green-room. (And I wish I might report all the things they said about the audience.) Stratford received one like a friend, not a customer, and took one into her confidence.

And I was doubly lucky—for I missed, by an accident, that prim red-brick preamble with which Stratford, even in winter-time, insists on greeting all the guests who come to her by train. The scarlet workhouse and the villas and the apoplectic little power-station importantly piff-paffing night and day—oh yes, they are an essential part of the play—and the electricity that is being piff-

paffed into being there throws a strong light on some significant features; but to see them first thing is to get the whole scene out of focus, and to fail, when you do come to the centre, to grasp the full significance of the sight. But I entered it, that wild winter's evening, by road, not by rail, and by that road from the south, one of the oldest tracks in England, which gives you, as no other road can do, the key to Stratford's real function and the clue to her character. You know the road, maybe? Dipping and curving across the Oxfordshire levels it comes—dropping from that blue rim of Edge Hill which is really the last rampart of Southern England —and then racing away towards the river that was once the barrier moat between Mercia and the kingdoms of the south. From the brink of the bastion, before you swoop down, you catch a glimpse of its curves gleaming in the sun—a scattered sequence of silver crescents, like broken mail-rings glinting in the grass; and every undulation in the road renews the shining vision. Yet it is with a singing suddenness, none the less, that you find that your road has become a great bridge—that the river itself slides below you, the willows bowing and bending upstream, and there on your left, serene against the sunset, that famous, unforgettable grouping of tender spire and cloudy elms and mirroring reaches which has become in the national mind a kind of symbol of earthly sweetness and content—and which announces as purely as a sudden peal of bells that you have at last really arrived.

And then—click!—just as suddenly, that scene is plucked away, and you are enfolded in the warm heart of the town, and the meaning of the sign is being explained. For there is no redbrick vestibule here. The bridge becomes Bridge Street at once; and Bridge Street, so broad and so homely, so cosy and clean, with a plump building just like a farm-lanthorn set down on the floor

at the far end, reminds you of nothing so much in the world as the great cobbled yard of an inn. Bright lights of actual inns are breaking through the gloaming all about you ; the great tilt-waggons of the country carriers, looking like Provençal diligences, are beginning to rumble away ; all round the airy rectangle, in butchers' shops and cafés, the gayer light of electricity sparkles unexpectedly ;—and the sudden brightness of the scene, so simple yet so glad, stirs the emotions strangely. No Mecca—no museum—Stratford glows like a wayside tavern, a happy refuge from the empty hills and fields. You see her playing her elemental part, the part she has always played—dutifully serving the surrounding country-side, turning its corn into the gold of light and laughter—a living part of England's body, knit up with the wide leagues you have traversed. And the very candour of the welcome carries an odd sense of something foreign. Again and again, in Brittany or Normandy, you have come on just such a scene. The dusk deepens, old bell-notes quaver softly through the darkness overhead, voices and laughter float across the square, the last great waggon, dark against the glowing windows, jingles out into the night. The thought comes to you that you have penetrated so deeply into England that you have reached something un-English and exotic.

§

And to have felt just that about Stratford is to have touched the very centre of her structure—the core that runs back and back through the years, connecting past and present, and forming a centre round which your late impressions can cohere. Lying at the very heart of England, there *is* something foreign about Stratford—as though the thin life of the landscape, cupped and concentrated in this central hollow, had been warmed into something sensuous and Southern. Physically, indeed, as

WARWICK CASTLE FROM THE RIVER.

The earliest portions of the great pile date from about the end of the 13th century and other parts belong to Jacobean and later times.

you will find, there is something strangely silken and seductive in its air. This very morning, at New Place, you were told much about Shakespeare's mulberry-tree; and were shown, in an adjoining garden, some slips from it flourishing prodigiously. That Shakespeare pruned the parent-tree is interesting,—but there is something still more significant. For the mulberry is a soft Southern plant, an alien here; only in a lax, rich air will it consent to flourish; and its ripeness is thus the confession of something luscious in the atmosphere—something which no doubt helped to heat its gardener too. The guide-books like to call the place the English Montpellier. Winter touches it but faintly. Spring, coming soon, comes ecstatically—comes dancing down the river in a foam of blossom and bird-song as passionately as though the Avon were indeed the Arno. And all the honeysweet summer through, from dark to dawn, the nightingales exult in the orchards as burningly as in the Boboli gardens.

And in the midst of all this the town *has* constantly played that part of gleaming hostelry. Maintained on these languorous river-levels, for their occasional comfort, by a race of soft-spoken people dwelling among the woods and hills, Stratford has always been a kind of simple courtesan, living contentedly among the gifts her suitors brought her, rearranging them subtly, touching them with beauty—turning their rude timber into little elvish houses full of light, carving the rock from their hills into cages for carolling bells. And as she ministered to these desires for joy and relaxation, something of the softness and sweetness of the air passed into her temper. You remember the subtle curves of her roadways, lulling the senses with the very cadence of the river? They are typical of deeper adaptations and a more living expression and response.

For all this beauty, this abundance, has had its profound effect upon the people of the place, the keepers of the

pleasure-house. There is a certain softness in their speech, a wonderful rose-warmth of complexion, which you miss as soon as you penetrate a few miles beyond the moat. There is a light fever in their blood, a lush Latin touch: the human equivalent of the ripeness all around. And here one stumbles on a striking thing. That it should be so—that all this alien richness and colour should have soaked so deeply in—is directly due, in large measure, to Stratford's central position. It is because it is buried so deeply in England that it has become so un-English. Glance at the map for a moment, and consider the effect of this midmost position in the past. Across the moat, and all around, the rest of England stretches like a great redoubt—a vast series of encircling outworks. Thus protected, it was left singularly undisturbed. Pressing always from the coasts, up the river-beds, the successive tides of invasion were diluted and absorbed long before they reached this kernel. Fenced by deep forest and begirt by buffer kingdoms, this patch of ground, indeed, might well become a kind of central coffer : a place where the old blood might be preserved with special purity,—the heart of England in a yet deeper and more dramatic sense. *Avon*, as we know, is pure Celtic for "river"; *Arden*, pure Celtic for "forest." It might not be difficult, were it needful, to prove that Hamlet was a Celt.

And then, in our own time, when the great stirabout began and steam tossed men's bodies to and fro like a lace-maker's bobbins, weaving the life of the land into one fairly homogeneous pattern, Stratford and South Warwickshire were still saved and held aloof. London's influence flagged before it passed the blue barrier of Edge Hill. The energies of the industrial North sank out of sight in the coal-pits near Birmingham. From the east it has always been shielded by that lone upland, faintly sprinkled with farms, which weakens the call of the towns and

workshops of Northamptonshire ; and the flanks of the Cotswolds on the other hand repel the last echoes from the forges of South Wales. Almost as completely as in such carved remote corners of the kingdom as Cumberland and Cornwall, has a racial purity been preserved.

And then, completing this protection, came the strangest stroke of all. Shakespeare—who played the part of ghost so well when living—came back to guard his birthplace. The towns, breeding a new kind of sentimentalism, began to despatch those endless armies of pilgrims in whose train you yourself are now marching. And the footprints of these Crusaders, instead of dimming the old features, helped to heighten and brighten them. The towns began to perfect the independence they had failed to destroy.

§

Now, this brave paradox is the result of many causes, but the simplest example of its operation is the effect of the invasion on such perishable things as timbers and tiles. It is obvious that Stratford would look far less Elizabethan than it is if its streets were not for ever overrun by a crowd of Americans and Germans. More quickly than most Midland market-towns indeed would its earlier architecture have succumbed—for it is built on a bed of rich red clay—and its native hue, now that Arden's oaks are done, is that of bricks and mortar. But these kind cosmopolitans pick the mortar away and pay for the old beams to be nursed. "To wake up some fine morning and hear through a latticed window the cawing of an English rookery" is the fixed dream of a good many of poor Clement Searle's fellow-countrymen. They come to Stratford positively ravening for such delights. And Stratford has learned to respond. She has heard the most terrifying hullabaloo go up because she proposed to replace

tattered old cottages with a neat new library ; and she begins to treat her beautiful body with respect.

And gradually, as a result, there has grown up a genuine pride. Your butcher or baker or candlestick-maker, after tying up your parcels neatly, will take you round to his store-room and point out its elderly oddities. The very beams of the place are numbered. And it reacts, too, this corporate self-consciousness, in a kind of clannishness and close racial pride, jealous as the pride of a caste. Family trees are cultivated here with quite extraordinary care. Pedigrees are studied. Links with the past are polished up. The names above the shop-windows will give you a number of examples of this continuity : enter into talk with their owners, and you will find how real is their sense of being *de race*. A descendant of the Charlecote Lucys runs the water-mill. A Samuel Fields is a flourishing law stationer—and a man of character too. The most discerning collector in the town is an Oliver Baker; it was an Oliver Baker, in the fifteen-forties, who was chief horologist to the Guild. These are not mere coincidences, to be set beside the case of the " Shakespeare Restaurant," kept by Mrs. Bacon, about which you have already made a highly original joke. The cosmopolitan attack on the place has provoked a real rally and concentration.* The

* One of the most interesting examples of this muster is to be found in Sheep Street, where Mr. William Jaggard, a direct descendant of the publisher of the First Folio, has established the Shakespeare Press, and is doing all he can to repay his ancestor's debt to the poet. But still more stirring are the reasons which led to the founding of another Stratford Press—" The Shakespeare Head Press " in Chapel Street, adjoining New Place. It was established by Mr. A. H. Bullen—that most delicate and masterly of living Elizabethan scholars—and Mr. Bullen has recorded the queer way he was lured from London to this tiny town. " The idea of establishing a printing-press in Stratford came to me in a dream," he confesses. " I had not visited Stratford for many years, when one night I dreamt that I had been looking over Shakespeare's Birthplace, and the Church where he lies buried, and was preparing to leave the town when someone said to me :

IN THE BEAUCHAMP CHAPEL OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH, WARWICK.

The Chapel is a beautiful example of Perpendicular architecture, built between 1443 and 1475. The figure under the framework of iron hoops is that of Richard Beauchamp, the founder of the Chapel.

modern Stratfordian has little need to travel in order to see the world; for the world is very willing to file humbly before his home. But whenever he does wander he infallibly returns. He bears an honoured name, and he comes back to enjoy his privileges.

And when he does return—this is perhaps the deepest point—he returns to a Stratford still playing, and playing more purely and vividly than ever before, its old original part of ministrant, courtesan—of delightful, temporary mistress. It has always been a guest-house, a place for gladness and loitering ; and so this polyglot army pouring through her streets simply serves to heighten and quicken her most native characteristics. She has no need to support herself, as other wayside towns have had to do, by taking up some nineteenth-century trade. She soils her fingers with not a single industry; her sole task is to provide pleasure; and as completely and deliberately as Monte Carlo's is her life devoted to that end. And as always happens with your pleasure-monger—artist, *fille de joie*, or what not—the duty helps to heighten her already ardent temper into something almost hectic. Passions, dreams, ambitions, not quite appropriate to little country towns, dance and gleam down these quiet, curving lanes. "Ah yes," mourned a reverend person with a head-shake. "One fears one must confess that ours is a somewhat wicked little town." Let us rather say — since it is

'You're not going away, surely, without seeing the Book?' 'What book?' said I. 'Why, haven't you heard of the whole edition of Shakespeare that is being printed here—the first complete edition ever printed and published in Shakespeare's own town?' I knew all the time that I was dreaming, and I thought to myself, 'I must remember this dream when I wake up.' I did remember it, and couldn't get away from it. I soon saw clearly that there would be no peace of mind for me until my dream came true." Well, the dream has come true—and visitors to Stratford can touch its materialization The Book has been printed—a noble thing: and the Press, still working actively, with Mr. Bullen still playing the part of Master Printer, already famous through Europe for the fine distinction of its work.

certainly not vicious—that the pulse of life beats more burningly here than elsewhere, that it is highly strung, emotional, mercurial. Symbols of wealth, the exciting amenities that go with world-travel, flash provocatively before its eyes: it is a costly cavalcade that pours beneath the lattices from April to October. These things stir the senses. And to the glittering appeal of life and the passionate warmth of Nature there has always been added, since the invasion began, the thrilling *réveillé* of Art. No town of the size in England has ever seen so many dramas, so much of "the vision of the pageant of man." From Siddons' day to Bernhardt's, all the great enchantresses have come here, have tossed their spells into the heady air and flung the world's most flaming poetry full into the little town's heart. If there were no pretty plain results, then poetry would be a poorer thing than we literary pilgrims pretend. But there are results, I think. The sap of the hills and the sweet juices of the circling land poured into this little place long ago to make a pool of sensuous life, and then, transformed, soared up again in the fountain of Shakespeare's songs — pure essence of England. To-day, the drops, returning, stir the pool profoundly and keep it tremulous and alive.

One sees many signs of that emotional stir. Into the very Town Hall, as well as into the most tightly closed cottage, the waves of the invisible tides wander and plash irrepressibly. A town councillor, you might think, would be much the same anywhere; but in Stratford one finds a certain elevation in their utterances, a dignity, a sense of the larger issues. Partly, this is pure caution, no doubt; these aldermen never know when some sentence of theirs, some proposition or refusal, may be caught up by the Press, megaphoned far and wide across the kingdoms, awakening all kinds of literary thunders: they begin to feel that all the world's their stage. But indeed, self-

THE PARADE, LEAMINGTON.

protection apart, it is plain that your Stratford Councillor is constantly facing questions of policy which have a touch of colour and emotion unpossessed by discussions of Drainage Schemes. They have to act, upon occasion, in the name of literary England; they send greetings to Weimar on Goethe's birthday, acknowledge wreaths from Paris on Shakespeare's. The Festival, and all that it stands for, is constantly engrossing them; and though much sad stuff about honouring memories and national poets is occasionally to be heard flowing from their lips, their minds are concerned with immaterial qualities, with questions of sentiment and ceremony, a care for the glimmer and the cry. And all this, remember, in the midst of markets and half-timbered tithe-barns, and within sight of the thatched farms where they were born. I have seen the Mayor of Stratford selling pigs one day and heard him addressing Europe on the next.

Similarly elsewhere. Sitting in a tavern, talking to a man of the kind who, in Worcester or Kettering, would weary you by grinding out the facts and phrases fed into him by newspapers, you see his speech begin to stir and quicken beneath this touch of the unseen. It is a local topic, if you like—like crops or South Africans elsewhere; but it leads the mind of the talker into movements that Chartereds do not generally excite. Nor, indeed, do I think it likely that in Lichfield, say, the local shopkeepers are absorbed like this. But the plays have that power, seemingly. To touch them, no matter how perfunctorily, is to finger a soft tentacle that draws you in and in. Or they make a kind of junction where one can start off on any journey. Thus, I met a postman who had begun to collect all the plants mentioned in the plays, and who had become a fine botanist—no, better than a botanist, a knowledgeable lover of lovely flowers—as a result. Thus, again, I found the sitting-room of a small green-

grocer lined with the most amazing collection of modern books: *Ideas of Good and Evil*, *Marius*, *Man and Superman*, *The Ball and the Cross*, *Intentions*. They all sprang from the Works: the Works had called in Dowden, and Dowden had led to Pater—Pater to Wilde and Yeats—Wilde to Beardsley, and Yeats to Robert Bridges. Another branch had run him off to Shaw and Chesterton, and worse. But the medley was quite organic—to run the eye along it was like watching the warm life stealing down consecutive ducts of a brain, resulting at last in an intricate mesh. I made the acquaintance of a pretty little dressmaker, too—*honi soit*—who had learned French out of sheer love for Kat; and who, as a result of the French, had achieved a winter on the Riviera as "companion." How many more country sempstresses are there who have supped at Ciro's, and seen the sunset from Cap Martin, and know the technique of absinthe-sipping?

And all the work of that wild fellow Shakespeare!

§

A blackbird's cry rang out like a prompter's bell—the curtains of mist swayed apart—and there, soft and low, snuggling down among its thatch, was the very cottage that Myltyl and Tyltyl came to when they had caught the Blue Bird of happiness. There were the hollyhocks and beehives, the flagged path running primly through the flowers. There were the dimity curtains and the twinkling panes, and the irresistible, rose-hung porch. The illusion was perfect. Realistic smoke ascended from the ivied chimney, a wicket-gate that looked quite workable stood in the hedge of clipped box. I looked at it longingly, wondering who and where the lucky players were, privileged to pass their lives inside a dream. And, even as I did so, in the porch appeared an actress—young and very beautiful—dressed in the true Arcadian costume of

sunbonnet and print. Shading her eyes in the true idyllic way, she glanced across the life-like lavender—saw me waiting in the wings. And then—and then—believe it if you can—she made a gesture of frank welcome—and beckoned me on to the boards. . . .

And yet there are people who protest that Anne Hathaway's Cottage is unromantic! (For of course, as you have guessed, it was Anne Hathaway's Cottage itself that I had stumbled on in the rain.) It is too trite for even Mr. Benson. "It testifies to nothing," says he, "but the silly and frivolous demands of trippers." But surely! Looked at only as a *coup de théâtre*, it seems to me rather splendid. Out of the least promising materials—the fag-end of an old farm, a garden Shakespeare never saw, and a porch he never passed through—there has gradually flowered this perfect embodiment of a popular idea. Anne Hathaway may have lived somewhere else—but this is just the kind of cottage the world would like its Anne Hathaways to dwell in: and so it has beautifully ripened in response to that desire. It is a pretty sentiment come true. The more baseless its story is proved to be, indeed, the more romantic does it seem; show that the poet never came here, and it would become the more perfectly a piece of the very purest poetry. It is a lyric written by an army of unknown dreamers, dumbly and unconsciously collaborating. From the ends of the earth, at this moment, its true architects and creators are marching here: Orientals and Russians, Americans, Germans, and Danes—thirty thousand of them every year. Thirty thousand pilgrims pass through that enchanted wicket every year, happy to walk, for a little, wide awake, through the cool flower-garths and chambers of a dream. Red brick villas crouch quite near it, there is a street-lamp just outside, a railway roars close by; but this devoted army keeps the idyll free from harm.

And there is something more dramatic still. The ghostly playwright who controls these thirty thousand stage-carpenters—inspiring them to preserve this incarnation of their own sweetest ideals—has not been content with an empty *mise en scène*. There is a *dramatis persona*, too, as idyllic as her setting: that Lady of the Sunbonnet. And it is a piece of characterization as subtle as anything in his Plays. She is really a cottager born—a direct descendant of the Hathaways; and all her life has been passed within the charmed circle of this hedge. Yet she is, at the same time, one of the most cosmopolitan persons in all England. For she receives, every day of her life, far more, and more varied, visitors than a popular Harley Street physician. She entertains on the most imperial scale. But all her guests insist on her continuing to play the part of simple cottager: winter and summer, storm or shine, she never lays aside that sunbonnet, emblem of unsophistication. You see the result? Inevitably she has to provide a subtle study of her own simplicity. Inevitably she has become an accomplished actress beautifully impersonating—herself.

And that is why she appears on this page, at the foot of this particular chapter. In her setting of roses and lavender, so strangely protected, she does exactly what Stratford itself, half a mile away, is doing among its own defended walls. She is the perfect symbol of Stratford's essential romance. Both repeat in a heightened, more passionate, and more exquisite way, their own most native characteristics: both practise an *exagération à propos* which is strangely like the intensification of fine art. Both have become characters in a play—and in each case the playwright is the same. The Memorial Theatre is often closed—but Shakespeare's last and longest drama, though unwritten, is performed continuously at Stratford, none the less, every day and every night throughout the year.

CHAPTER IV

WARWICK, LEAMINGTON, AND KENILWORTH

"To your little book on Stratford," said its publishers, "you will now be good enough to add an extra chapter dealing with Warwick and Leamington." "Very good," says I. "Delighted, I'm sure"—and took to the road forthwith.

Now there may be more ways than one of entering Stratford, but there is only one real right road by which to leave it, and that is by the road—a road radiant, rare, irresistible—that runs away northwards from the Red Lion Inn, away through the woodlands to Warwick. And why is it so radiant? Ah! you wouldn't need to ask that if you could have tramped it with me that brave morning. It was a morning of clouds, kingly clouds—white-shouldered creatures, pacing majestically, trailing robes of purple as they ranged—and leagues of billowing oaks and bronze-bright beeches made the carpet across which they strode; and each in turn, as he passed, seized the sun like a lamp, and set its light circling and flashing, letting loose sudden swirls of sunshine that set far-away valleys aflame, searching all the landscape with scudding pools of colour till it looked like a tray of rolling gems. And why is the road such a rare road? Why, for one thing, because it still does what so few roads have leave to do nowadays: runs free, wholly free, of town, hamlet, or village for eight immaculate

miles. For, far away on the left-hand, its rival the railroad, fairly outwitted for once, toiling in a slow semicircle, two miles to the turnpike's one, draws all the townlings and clachans to its side,—and so leaves this wonderful highway free to slip through the silence unsullied, with scarce a cottage, scarce a farm, to spoil the perfect spell. For three full hours, if you are walking, England is absolutely yours, yours as unreservedly as though great mountains hedged you from intrusion, and in a guise how much more typical and tender than she ever wears among the empty hills. Than these dipping soft miles of mid-Warwickshire, indeed, there are few landscapes more fruitful and kind, yet the only signs of their subjection, the only hints that they are captured and controlled, are the names on the little leaning sign-posts at the cross-roads—names that seem themselves scarcely enfranchized from the soil, so full are they of fragrance, of the sweetness and sap of the earth.

And at the end of the eighth mile, like a town in a tale, Warwick rises suddenly out of the earth, waiting to bewitch you still further.

§

It rises softly out of the soil like a town in a dream, a silent crop of towers and walls, the jagged trunk of a giant tree of stone. For it is out of the solid substance of the earth that it is all visibly hewn—the stones of its topmost spire are made of the very stuff in which its bare roots twine—and it is into the living rock that the road itself actually leaps. It had the air of some quaint crag, queerly twisted and stained, rather than of any city made by hands, and when I followed the road in the heart of the rock, the sense of sheer enchantment deepened gloriously. On the north side, indeed, as I discovered later on, the boundaries waver and wander indistinctly, but here on the

south the division between country and town is as sharp and sudden as a blow : one minute the sight is sailing unchecked above those surging leagues, the next it is shuttered as in a crafty room, surrounded by hushed, elvish shapes; and the blare and clean thunder of the wind has changed into the quiet creak-creaking of a casement somewhere out of sight. Entered by a door, like a house, cut up into quiet squares like little rooms, Warwick is full of that effect of cunning cosiness, of chuckling security, which always seems to wink and leer at one in old walled towns. That morning, just as I approached it, one of the pacing giants overhead flicked his robe of rain across my path, and the sudden sting of the shower heightened the effect of hush and safety. And just as I entered, too, the day of the week being Monday and the hour high noon, the bells of St. Mary's overhead began to falter out *Home, Sweet Home.** It was the magically perfect touch. The foolish old lovable notes came fluttering down among dormers and mullions and casements that might have been the tune turned solid, translated into architectural terms.

Now, it may have been just the glowing reaction to that gallant eight miles through Arden, but it certainly seemed to me as I wandered through the streets that morning, through lanes that one couldn't avoid comparing to cracks and crevices in the rich, ripe, mouldering mass, that the whole place, from basement to bells, and from the west gate (where the Leycester Hospital stands) to the east (where Landor lived), was woven into a wonderful unity, as though it were indeed a town in a story, still saved from the world and its discrepancies by that girdle of

* Sheer luck ! They play *Home, Sweet Home* on Mondays only. It is *Jenny Jones* on Tuesdays, *The Blue Bells of Scotland* on Wednesdays, on Thursdays *The Minstrel Boy*, the *March of Scipio* on Fridays (I'd like to hear them at that), on Saturdays *The Last Rose of Summer*, and on Sunday *The Easter Hymn.*

crumbling wall. The disastrous note in these old towns of ours, of course, is always provided by the townsfolk themselves: so cute, so capable, so well-equipped, so eminently twentieth-century, they make the dim old architecture look as foolish as stage-scenery by daylight. But here in Warwick invisible webs, spun long ago, stretch across and across the narrow streets; the townsfolk are entangled in a mesh that holds them magically aloof, making them as much part of the enchanted structure as the structure itself seems a pure outcrop of the earth. Down at Leycester's Hospital, for instance, I found a dozen hale old men, turning beautifully drowsy and dropsical at the bidding of a dead man's mildewed deed. Warwick was absorbing them, making them part of her fabric; they had to dress as folks dressed when she was young, live in the way she then thought right; and already they looked a little like her carved beams walking, or figures from her stained-glass windows come alive. And there, anyhow, was the plain material fact: the very spirit which moulded these elvish walls and towers was also kneading the lives of these pensioners, forcing their nineteenth-century souls to fit a sixteenth-century frame. Enchantment indeed!

And a minute later I stumbled on an even stranger proof of the invisible powers that haunt the place, the old influences that lurk in its recesses. Just behind Jury Street, close to Castle Hill, there is a hushed little pleasaunce, bordered by trees, where the great Pageant of 1906 was held. Into this I had strayed; it was simple and hushed, and it was pleasant to picture the vivid groups breaking and recombining on the grass beneath the grey cloud of the Castle; pleasant, too, with such a subject, to proceed to earn one's bed and dinner for the night by writing "the extra chapter" you are reading now. "*Yes, Warwick is wonderful,*" I went on to say. "*It twines*

THE PARISH CHURCH AND PUMP ROOM AT LEAMINGTON.

The popularity of the medicinal waters at Leamington dates back to 1786, when the second well was sunk.

round the trunk of the Castle like ivy round a great grey tree, and the Castle looks down serenely upon its cuddling charge. And the visible completeness of this picture is really a perfect symbol of the essential unity of the place." And just when I had got that far, and was wondering how on earth to drive it home, the little door of my retreat burst open, and the very illustration I wanted came tripping towards me over the grass.

Little and chubby, and lean and long—blondes and brunettes, boys and girls—as though trooping at the heels of some invisible piper—a horde of tiny children tumbled through. Down the dim lanes all about I could hear the patter and shuffle of the approach; pouring from every cranny of the queer old town came this army of eldritch mites. For they were the queerest little crumbs of humanity: barefooted, bright-eyed, tattered, and torn, like a lot of little gnarled and fluttering gnomes. In a second my pleasaunce was alive with them—an eddy of rags and squeaks and trills—mad as a midsummer dream; and every moment the fantasy grew. A knot of cheery grown-ups appeared, uttering loud, encouraging cries; a pair of porters followed them, staggering under mysterious crates; and out from a second door, simultaneously, burst another knot, bearing tables and forms. The crates crashed open, a spate of bright boots appeared, and there, in a trice, every skipping foot in the place was squirming in a shiny leather case. . . . I fail altogether, I feel sure, to convey the effect of feverish unreality, of the deserted, ancient town, so sleepy and still, the grey crag of the castle looming aloft, and then this sudden shower of mannikins. And all the while, overhead, like children repeating a lesson, the bells stumbling solemnly once more through the syllables of *Home, Sweet Home*.

I seized one of the grown-ups; he, at least, seemed real. "What is it all about?" I cried. "Who *are* these

morsels? Why here? *Home, Sweet Home.*" He proved the perfect informant. What I had seen was the operation of one of Warwick's innumerable old charities. It was honeycombed by ancient bequests, and one of them brought every barefooted child in the place, once a year, a pair of good strong boots — as I had seen. A good many bare feet? Why, yes, for Warwick had a good many poor. There are no manufactures here, for one thing: local patriotism keeps industrialism away. "It would be a pity, don't you think so, sir, to spoil such a dear old place with factory chimneys and dirt?" And then, too, perhaps the presence of the charities themselves have kept alive a strange, dim class dependent on such doles. . . .

There it was! It rounded off the picture of the place as patly as the last line of a sonnet. Just as completely as my Lord of Leycester's dreamers at the gate, these little squirming bodies were being woven into the fabric of the town. They were marionettes worked by strings that ran up and up, through the dead years, to the days of Warwick's prime. The thoughts and desires of the brains that planned the gnomish houses were still alive; they prowled to and fro in the narrow streets; they seized the bodies of the little children born here, and of the old men who tottered here to rest, and made them a part of the old structure, as odd and elvish as the dormers and dim squares. In any other place, indeed, at any other time, one might have been a little horrified; and, perhaps, to be frank, for an instant one *did* feel a faint surge of revolt, a longing to break down the bars of old benefits which kept these little lives so congruously caged. For one instant, perhaps, the place did become a bit ghoulish, like the cave of some old giant, kept alive as a curiosity to interest you and me, and fed on the bodies of little children. . . . But that, of course, was rubbish. Or had the spell of the place

descended upon me too? Anyhow, "*Warwick*," I continued, turning again to my task, "*is wonderfully one and indivisible. There is no place so like a home*——" And I snapped my notebook to.

§

It is two miles from Warwick to Leamington, and just the same number of centuries. That sounds pretty good going, perhaps, but it really only partly indicates the true extent of the journey. For the difference between the two towns is one not to be measured by mere terms of space and time. Warwick seems a part of Warwickshire, a bit of the landscape twisted and pierced; as much a piece of nature as a cave or a hollow tree. But Leamington is modish, mannered, cut to a pattern like a frock, and though made by living people for frank bodily needs, seems immeasurably more artificial than the town which is really just a curio. It is not by talking of centuries that you measure the gulf between the two. To the traveller who has been softly pursuing the spirit of ancient England, the sudden sight of Leamington, at the end of the Warwick road, must seem rather like stumbling on a fashionable garden-party in the middle of a tangled forest. The figure, indeed, has a double aptness. For all these mid-Warwickshire highways bore their way through surges of leafage; they are gorges fighting and burrowing among great green cliffs. Trees leap up about them, solid gouts of verdure, as though some force beneath the soil burst volcanically through. To look abroad from the ramparts of Warwick Castle, especially in early summer time, when grass and leafage are one tone, is to see the wide land boiling monstrously, as though an army of wild shapes were struggling beneath the yielding film. And in the midst of all this shaggy energy Leamington clears a neat space, settles down with a soft rustle of

elegant skirts, and rings for afternoon tea. And then—this is the crowning touch—asks you coquettishly to call her—"Leafy Leamington"!

Yet, in spite of all this—or perhaps because of it—I confess to a weakness for Leamington. After the narrow ways of great Elizabeth, her Georgian Parade, her Pump-room Gardens and her Crescents, are as pleasant as clean linen after work. Freed from the Gothic glooms through which it has been stumbling for so long, the sight goes skimming down these cool spaces like a released skater. Afternoon tea, after all, *is* a charming institution; one needn't be an Oxford Fellow to admit it. And served just here, gleaming and tinkling coolly in the midst of this army of aboriginal shapes, it has a fine added touch of insolence. It may not be war, but it is magnificent. There is a place in the Bois de Boulogne which has the same delicious audacity. You have been groping after dark down hushed pathways, the wild scent of moss and fern in your nostrils, a glimmer of starlit lake on your left; and then suddenly you stumble out into a blaze of lights and madcap music—a dazzle of Chinese lanterns, crimson bandsmen, and diners jewelling the grass. Beleaguered by darkling woods, glittering like a Monticelli, Leamington, after sunset, has a scarcely less lovely impertinence. And the scene, too, both by day and by night, has an undertone of very real bravado. Its eighteenth-century clothes may be borrowed, but its spirit is genuinely periwigged; it has the fine eighteenth-century affectation of going to the guillotine with a jest. That is the stirring thing about a spa—that is the dramatic touch that distinguishes them from mere happy-go-lucky watering-places like Brighton or Llandudno. For half the people who come here are on a more strenuous and sterner mission than the mere nonchalant pursuit of pleasure. They are fighting ill-health; they come here to outwit the old adversary.

Beneath all the airiness and elegance a tense human drama is forever in progress; the music, that seems so careless, masks the noise of a dark campaign, and the gay lights are a little like the fires lit by travellers in wild forests to keep dim adversaries at bay. It is this vital core to the place, the reality of this central struggle, that gives durability to Leamington's charm. It saves it from insipidity. You loiter, play croquet, sip tea or Metchnikoff milk; you are surrounded by other sippers and triflers, and the very perfection with which the feud is concealed gives a rich touch to the spectacle. It has the thrill of a *fête galante* threaded by secret feuds and intrigues. It is one of the few places where modern England could make Watteau feel at home. Its air would be good for his frail health; its hushed boulevards, bright with costumes, full of movement without noise, would satisfy and soothe his senses; and under the lanterns of the Pump-room Gardens, where the masquers move to and fro beneath the trees, against the glimmering fountains, he would find the material for a new series of his fêtes.

§

But the reader of this book, who (I hope) is neither an artist nor an invalid, will perhaps prefer to think of Leamington as a cool, delightful ante-room to Kenilworth.

The castle lies five miles away by road, four if you take the train; and though the road is among the most wondrous in Warwickshire, there is much to be said for the L. & N. W. For the highway creeps towards it through canyons of verdure; you are right at the ford beneath them before you get your first glimpse of its walls. But the railway-station stands a mile off, on a low parallel ridge, and to approach it from there is to see it first from afar, across a clear space of swelling country. And that is how Kenilworth ought first to be seen; not otherwise can you

ever quite realize its special quality and power. For, unlike most other famous castles, it dominates by sheer bulk alone: it crowns no crag; it uses no trick of scarp or river to augment its might. It rises in the midst of a wide stretch of country that is no more than a wooded plain. None the less, it looms above that landscape; seems to stamp the ten square miles of woods and tillage and sprinkled farms into an obedient pedestal; to form the physical axis of half a shire. That is what you realize when you approach it from the station. It rides there, immobile, like a great ship on a docile sea. The prolonged slow heave of the land flows under and past it, powerless to disturb its poise, just as one has seen the tide in an estuary pouring impotently about the flanks of an ironclad. It is the hub of the whole vast scene. Without it (you feel) the countryside would grow meaningless. All the contours and features of the land seem to bear a vital relation to that silent centre-piece.

And yet you never mistake it for a mere crag or stiff lump of hill. It is plainly a piece of art, made by hands; its colour, a lowering red, is in dour opposition to the fields; and with its squareness and steepness, its blunt rectangular build, it has even the aspect of a giant house. Its old battlements and leaping towers have vanished now; the line it makes against the sky is straight and solid—just the line of a sober roof. It is as a huge house, built for heroic needs, a home for towering and resolute men, that the place seizes the imagination. It stirs an emotion deeper and dimmer than mere patriotism. It fills the heart of the onlooker with a strange, new pride—the pride of being ranked, against the woodland, on the side of the creatures who built it. Aboriginal fears and hatreds, deeply hidden but not dead, stir and mutter at the sight; the secret enmity we feel towards the unhuman forces that wave those matted arms in the forest burns once

more in the blood. Far more than the cunning fields, clinging so closely, the true enslavers of the soil, this dead and hollow hull seems to challenge and overbear those powers. We are fond of being primitive nowadays, and talk beautifully of the great green mother. Here is an emotion more rudimentary still. It is Kenilworth's great gift to arouse it.

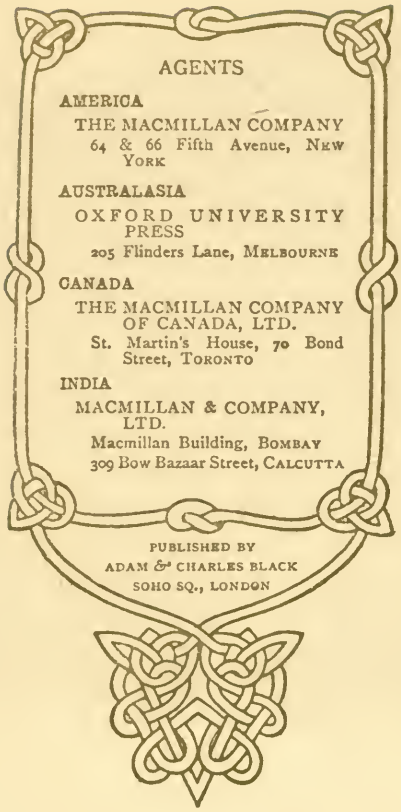
The emotions to be felt later on, when once within the walls, come well within the period of history. One of the pleasantest things about the interior is the fact that it, too, is exterior—just a walled field. The brief recital of dates and battles felt so appropriate is thus administered in the open air—and the visitor who feels with Sir Walter that " the purpose of the place is to impress on the musing traveller the transitory value of human possessions, and the happiness of those who enjoy a humble lot in virtuous contentment," can conduct his grave researches prone upon crisp grass, with sheep cropping about him and the hot sun sluicing down. Even platitudes can do no harm when taken under such conditions. As for the history lesson, a good guide lives among the sheep—an anxious, spectacled man with (I am sure) a large family—and with him, even if I could, I would judge it a shabby trick to compete. He has a poor opinion of us writing fellows, anyhow. He will ask you, cautiously, if you have heard of a novel dealing with the Castle, and if you are sufficiently guarded in your reply, will drop a dark hint or two about the book's reliability. " An inaccurate book," says he. " Amy Robsart, for instance, died in——" and proceeds to bombard the walls of the Shirra's structure as ruthlessly as the Roundheads did the original. How far his soreness might carry him I shall now never know, for just as it was beginning to appear that the sacred walls had been pulled about in order to provide building material for Abbotsford, I happened to mention that I

was a distant relation of the writer's. The rest of our intercourse was purely formal. Not even my hasty assurance that I, too, thought his books overrated could quite win me back his confidence.

But, for compensation, there was always the view. Safe inside the walls, with the sweet turf beneath your feet and England laughing below you in the sun, the dusky feud is forgotten, you make your peace with Pan. Spring was pouring up the land that afternoon, bursting into scented foam at every hedge. The woods were lustrous islands, the fields shone like shot-silk ; there seemed better things to do than marvel at the number of hogsheads of beer that were drunk when Leicester entertained Eliza. There, beneath one, was England herself, the very vision which history labours vainly to evoke, the living source of all the battles and the braveries, the field where they shone for a little like momentary flowers. They have faded, but the field remains. It is given to us like a great garden. It is ours, to grow what we will. . . .

"But the village itself is being spoiled, sir," my guide was saying bitterly. "Quite a number of people from Coventry live here now—workpeople and that sort. They use Kenilworth as a kind of suburb, and go into Coventry every day. Men employed in the motor-works there." Well, even that seemed more romantic than old beer bills. A fine thing to breed English youngsters in sight of these brave walls, in the midst of these marching woods. And a fine thing, and a thrilling, to reflect that everyone who buys a new Daimler is dowering someone with all this beauty—is helping to turn the trees into men and women walking, to achieve the true subjugation of Nature by transforming all this dumb beauty into bright limbs and conquering brains.

BILLING AND SONS, LTD., PRINTERS, GUILDFORD


AGENTS
AMERICA
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
64 & 66 Fifth Avenue, NEW YORK
AUSTRALASIA
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
205 Flinders Lane, MELBOURNE
CANADA
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA, LTD.
St. Martin's House, 70 Bond Street, TORONTO
INDIA
MACMILLAN & COMPANY, LTD.
Macmillan Building, BOMBAY
309 Bow Bazaar Street, CALCUTTA
PUBLISHED BY
ADAM & CHARLES BLACK
SOHO SQ., LONDON